

APPENDIX E

PROGRESS ON SELF-EVALUATION AND CASE STUDIES

A. Introduction

A major goal of this evaluation has been to assist legal aid providers with developing and carrying out self-evaluation, using the results to make decisions about changes in service delivery. In 2002, focus groups and meetings were held with legal aid providers receiving Equal Access Fund (EAF) grants and other stakeholders to determine the best approach to statewide evaluation design. Given the range of cases, services, and clients served by projects, it was determined by the evaluation team that no single statewide design could encompass the measures and outputs of all the EAF projects in the state. As a result, two decisions were made:

1. To base this evaluation on administrative program data, narrative project descriptions provided by the programs, the case closing and other matters data required by the Federal Legal Services Corporation, and individual project evaluations completed by programs before May 2004.
2. To provide the necessary support and technical assistance to implement good evaluation practice at the program level. Local evaluation practice is referred to as self-evaluation in this report.

This appendix reports on the statewide evaluation project's success at implementing and encouraging self-evaluation efforts.

B. History

Consultants from The Resource for Great Programs assisted in developing the self-evaluation strategy. Programs were invited to discuss and begin developing their specific evaluation plans, objectives, and measurement tools at a statewide meeting of legal aid directors on October 30, 2002. Following that meeting, a series of subject matter-focused phone conferences were held to begin an exchange of ideas on how to best evaluate different types of projects. The consultants and staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the Legal Services Trust Fund (LSTF), and the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) created a "Toolkit" of research

instruments for evaluating the work of legal aid organizations. Work on assembling the Toolkit and a set of instructions on how to utilize it was conducted during the spring and summer of 2003. The Toolkit itself was finalized and distributed (both in hard copy and via the Web) in early fall 2003. A summary of its contents is included at the end of this appendix.

Following distribution of the Toolkit, another statewide conference was held in January, 2004. Representatives from approximately 40 legal aid organizations from around the State attended this one day workshop on program evaluation. The morning consisted of a training on the basics of program evaluation research. In the afternoon, the attendees were broken into groups of five to eight people to work on developing an implementation plan for their own evaluation projects. As a follow-up to the workshop, over the next several months another series of subject matter-oriented phone conferences was held in order to exchange program evaluation ideas and strategies. Programs were also encouraged to discuss questions about research issues with AOC and trust fund staff. This process continues, and it remains part of the long-term strategy to use the opportunities presented by the Equal Access Fund to evaluate and improve the delivery of legal aid to low-income Californians.

For purposes of the current report, programs were invited to submit, along with the required data reported in chapter 2, an interim report on their program evaluation efforts for the 2003–2004 fiscal year. A one-page outline was provided regarding the content of the report. Programs were asked to limit the reports themselves to no more than five pages. Those programs that were conducting more extensive evaluations for other purposes (such as to meet the requirements of foundation grants) were invited to submit those reports in lieu of the form suggested.

Self-evaluation will become an on-going part of program reporting. The trust fund will continue to require annual reports on progress toward creating and improving self-evaluations – as well as reporting on the evaluations themselves. The research staff at the CFCC expects to continue to work with the trust fund and LAAC to provide on-going technical support and revision of the Toolkit evaluation instruments. Those programs that have not yet done so will be encouraged to begin moving from narrative evaluations to more formal assessments of their efforts using data collection instruments and structured analyses.

C. Results of Progress in Conducting Project Evaluations

Approximately one-half of all projects reported that they conducted some phase of self-evaluation in 2003. One-half of these 69 projects that conducted self-evaluation *began* their evaluation effort in 2003. Forty-one percent reported never having engaged in evaluation before this current effort. While there is much room for improvement in data gathering and analysis, this is a substantial increase as a result of trust fund and CFCC efforts.

Sixty-nine projects indicated that they were in the process of doing more formal project evaluations that involved collecting data. As of the writing of this report, 26 of those had

completed and submitted evaluation reports covering the period of time from October 1, 2003, through May 2004.¹ CFCC staff developed an evaluation progress coding system and trust fund staff reviewed the materials that had been submitted or described by the 69 projects conducting program evaluations. The results of that coding are set forth below. Following that, 8 in-depth summaries of project evaluation efforts are presented as exemplars of legal aid evaluation.

Of the projects indicating they had planned or developed an evaluation strategy (69), most had also selected evaluation instruments (68) and begun data collection (65). About 75 percent (52) further reported that they had completed their data collection. About 46 percent (32) of the projects indicated they were conducting qualitative data analysis, while 35 percent (24) reported that they were conducting quantitative data analysis. Forty-six percent (42) indicated they had completed their data analysis. As mentioned above, 26 reports were submitted to the trust fund. These results are set out in Chart E-1.

Chart E-1

Progress in Self-Evaluation

Stage of Evaluation	Number	Percent
Evaluation planned or developed	69	100
Evaluation instruments selected	68	99
Data collection implemented	65	94
Data collection completed	52	75
Evaluation report written	46	67
Qualitative data analysis conducted	32	46
Data analysis completed	32	46
Quantitative data analysis conducted	24	35

Number of projects reporting = 69

Chart E-2 shows the distribution of evaluation methodologies selected by the 68 projects reporting instrument selection. Most, 59 percent, indicated they were conducting a survey. In general, based on a review of submissions and statements made in project reports, these were mainly client satisfaction or exit surveys. The next largest category, 21 percent in each case, consisted of interviews and some form of client or case outcome measurement. File review accounted for 13 percent, while 9 percent conducted focus groups and 7 percent did tracking of cases and outcomes using in-house case management data. Courtroom or other observation strategies were relatively rare at 3 percent.

¹ Most of the projects reporting data on the number of cases handled, clients helped, or services rendered reported for the six months from October 1, 2003, through March 31, 2004.

Chart E-2

Self-Evaluation Methodology

Type of Instrument	Number	Percent
Survey	40	59
Interviews	14	21
Client or case outcome measurement	14	21
File review	9	13
Focus group	6	9
Service provision tracking	5	7
Courtroom or other observation	2	3
Other	2	3

Number of projects reporting = 68

The majority of projects, 73 percent, collected data from income-eligible clients, as shown in Chart E-3. The other two major sources of information came from community-based partner organizations (20 percent) and other legal service providers (17 percent). Twelve percent reported using other sources of data such as census information.

Chart E-3

Population Studied in Evaluation

Population Studied	Number	Percent
Income-eligible clients	48	73
Community-based partner organizations	13	20
Legal service providers	11	17
Other	8	12

Number of projects reporting = 66

Chart E-4 shows the methods used with specific populations. Of the 48 projects collecting data from income-eligible clients, most (69 percent) conducted surveys. Client or case outcome measures were used by 29 percent of the projects, while 21 percent conducted interviews. File reviews were used by 19 percent of the projects doing evaluations.

Chart E-4

Methods Used to Evaluate Populations

	Number	Percent
Income-eligible clients (number of projects = 48)		
Survey	33	69
Client or case outcome	14	29
Interview	10	21
File review	9	19
Legal service provider (number of projects = 11)		
Survey	7	64
Interview	4	36
Client or case outcome	3	27
Community-based partner organizations (number of projects = 13)		
Survey	10	77
Interview	5	38
Focus group	5	38

For the 11 projects collecting data from other legal service providers, 64 percent fielded surveys, 36 percent did interviews, and 27 percent looked at client or case outcome data. The 13 projects getting feedback from community-based partner organizations used a similar mix of surveys (77 percent), interviews (38 percent), and focus groups (38 percent).

D. Evaluation Exemplars

Below are examples of some of the more advanced evaluations conducted by projects during the study period. They are offered here as models of good evaluation practice, keeping in mind that much remains to be achieved, and that evaluation itself is an ever-evolving practice with no fixed end-point.

Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Asian Language Legal Intake Project

Evaluation Overview: Legal aid hotline evaluated using multiple types of data.

Project description

The Asian Language Legal Intake Project (ALLIP), an over \$300,000 initiative with a contribution from EAF of \$127,000, is an effort to increase access to the legal system for those who speak Mandarin (43 percent), Cantonese (16 percent), or Vietnamese (40 percent). The service delivery model centers around a telephone hotline that allows project staff to provide counsel and advice on legal matters such as family, immigration, public benefits, housing, employment, and consumer law. Staff also assists in completing legal forms and documents, provides education about common legal issues, distributes legal information materials, engages in brief service and advocacy on behalf of clients if possible, and refers clients to other sources of in-depth assistance if needed. During the one-year study period detailed below, the project received 6,500 calls.²

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation was conducted by a paid, nonprofit consultant, the money for which was built into the project's initial planning budget. The project evaluation focused on four factors: (1) type of client served through the intake system; (2) types of services provided; (3) level of satisfaction of clients with the services provided; and (4) outcomes of those services for the clients. Data for the study were collected using four different methods: (1) telephone interviews with a random sample of clients one to nine months after completion of service; (2) interviews with all project leaders; (3) analysis of project database statistics for all cases; (4) telephone interviews with staff at four partner organizations that represent clients referred by the project.

Interviews with clients were conducted by project staff and volunteers, while other interviews were conducted by a paid, outside consultant who also analyzed the data and wrote a final report. The interviews were conducted over the telephone using a standard written form on which responses were recorded. The project data was gathered via a standard client intake form.

Results

Telephone interviews were conducted with 41 clients who had received service from ALLIP in the previous one to nine months. Twenty-one (51 percent) of the respondents stated that the hotline was "greatly" helpful or "quite a bit" helpful. Only two (5 percent) found the hotline "not at all helpful." Those respondents who stated that the hotline was not very helpful generally had issues that were either unresolvable within the limits of the law or were of a nature that rendered them unlikely to be successfully resolved through a hotline type of service.

² The study period for this project was May 2002 through March 2003.

Clients who got service directly from the hotline were more satisfied than those who were referred elsewhere. While about half the clients were very satisfied with the hotline services, only about 25 percent of those who were referred elsewhere for help felt that way.

Sixty-one percent of the clients said they followed through with the advice they were given, while about one quarter stated they did not. Common reasons clients gave for not following through were that the suggestions were “too hard,” clients also saying that they lacked confidence or were afraid or discouraged. In other cases, clients said they had simply changed their minds about what they wanted to do (most common in divorce and other family law issues). Of those who followed through with the advice, 61 percent said it worked “very well” and another 17 percent said it “sort of” worked.

Nearly half (47 percent) of the clients achieved at least partial resolution of their problem. Those who did not achieve a resolution stated that it was either too early to tell or they had dropped the matter. Of the 27 percent of clients who stated that their problem was not resolved, most of those cases involved issues that either could not be resolved within the limits of the law or were not within the scope of hotline services.

Eighty-six percent of the clients reported at least some improvement in their situation, with 69 percent reporting that they were able to get at least some of what they wanted. The hotline was successful in helping clients feel they had been listened to, with 70 percent replying in the affirmative. Finally, 76 percent said they would use the hotline again.

Interviews with six staff members of four partner organizations of ALLIP revealed that those organizations feel that ALLIP serves a valuable function, frees up partner attorneys to do more in-depth work, fosters collaboration on the issues involved in serving the target population, and provides high-quality referrals.

Conclusions

Based on the data gathered during the study period, the services provided by ALLIP led to an improvement in the clients’ situations and generated a good degree of client satisfaction with its services. The project fosters collaboration among the legal aid providers in the greater Los Angeles area in addressing the challenges of serving this hard-to-reach population. Suggestions for future improvements in the program include an analysis of whether there are specific ways that the referral process could be made more user-friendly, consideration of whether more could be done to assist clients who fail to follow through on the advice or information they are given, and an examination of whether a single point-of-intake system for the target population would be better than the current multiple point-of-intake system currently in place.

California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Worker's Rights Project

Evaluation Overview: Legal aid support center training and assistance to advocates evaluated using customer satisfaction questionnaire.

Project description

The Worker's Rights Project, operated by the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, uses annual revenues of approximately \$73,000 per year (\$55,000 from EAF) to train frontline advocates representing migrant farmworkers in the areas of labor, education, and immigration rights. The project uses a half-time attorney and half-time paralegal to conduct training seminars, offering seven training events to a total of 344 attendees (67 from qualified legal aid providers, 277 from other organizations) during the six-month reporting period. Four of those trainings used a single instructor format, while three were panel presentations. The project also provides more individual training and assistance through technical advice and co-counseling arrangements, serving some 15 organizations in this manner during the study period (11 qualified legal aid providers, 4 other organizations).

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation goal was to assess the effectiveness of the trainings, technical assistance, and co-counseling arrangements. A short questionnaire developed by project staff was distributed to 75 customers following trainings or after assistance was provided. Thirty-seven completed evaluations were returned. Participants' legal experience ranged from 3 months to 30 years. The questionnaires asked these questions: (1) Did advocates gain new information or skills that would help them better represent clients; (2) Did advocates gain basic knowledge to prosecute wage and hour claims or other worker's rights claims; (3) What additional training would best meet their current needs.

A short questionnaire was also distributed to those with whom the project worked as technical advisor or co-counsel, asking (1) whether advocacy skills had improved; (2) whether advocates were now more confident about filing impact litigation; (3) whether impact litigation filed would have been filed without project support; (4) what improvements could be made in the support provided.

Results

Results, analyzed qualitatively, were compiled from the 37 completed questionnaires. Thirty-four of the respondents said that project services had provided them with support that enabled them to better represent their clients. Twenty-nine people said they were able to serve their community better as a result of project support. Fifteen of those responding indicated that their skills as advocates had improved as a result of the training or assistance they received. Meanwhile, 12 respondents stated they would not have been able to bring the worker's rights cases they had without the co-counseling assistance of project staff.

Further analysis of the data revealed that advocates with less than five years of experience found the trainings and co-counseling assistance to be of the most help. Advocates with more than five years experience found co-counseling arrangements to be the “most effective way to represent the greatest number of affected clients.” Advocates with more than five years experience also found the educational materials and information about policy changes affecting their client communities to be particularly helpful.

Areas for improvement that were noted included more training on education and immigration issues.

Conclusions

This evaluation revealed that the project’s substantive trainings and skills development activities were most helpful to those with less than five years legal experience. Those with more than five years experience benefited most from the technical assistance and advocacy support, which they felt helped them to serve more clients more effectively. The results also uncovered a desire for more training in the area of education, particularly for less experienced advocates. In response, the project hired an advocate to work on education and health issues.

Child Care Law Center, Increasing Equity and Access to Child Care Subsidies for Legal Services Clients

Evaluation Overview: Legal aid support center training and assistance to advocates evaluated using semistructured, open-ended interviews.

Project description

This project provides training and support to field program advocates working on increasing access to high-quality child care for low-income families and children. It operates on an overall budget of slightly over \$777,000, about \$55,000 of which comes from the EAF. Although the project regularly seeks feedback on its trainings and publications, traditionally devoted to the areas of subsidy and regulation, the purpose of this evaluation was to assess the utility of the project’s efforts to broaden the focus of its work to include training and materials on increasing the availability of child care in low-income communities, and the inclusion in such child care of resources for children with special needs.

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation focused on uncovering the opinions of legal aid advocates and other support center partners on the priorities of the project, especially with regard to its efforts to broaden its focus. The evaluation format consisted of five open-ended interview questions administered by a senior project staff attorney, who met with a total of 30 people (24 from field programs and 6 from other support centers). All people interviewed had worked with the project during the last three years, and an attempt was made to draw from a variety of programs. The interviews lasted

30 minutes or more, were conducted in person or over the phone, and involved both structured and follow-up probing questions. The questions were developed by project legal staff and the executive director.

Each of the interviewees was asked (1) how the organization does intake; (2) whether there were written scripts for conducting intake, focusing on issue spotting, and whether written materials are mailed to callers; (3) what kind of child care issues your organization encounters; (4) are there specific projects you have implicating child care issues; (5) what assistance this project could most effectively render to your organization.

The interviews were qualitatively analyzed by project staff. First, the interviewer summarized the responses based on interview notes, focusing on common themes. The program's executive director also reviewed the interview notes. As themes were developed, they were discussed by legal staff at weekly meetings. A final report on common themes was written and reviewed by legal staff at a special meeting, then presented to the program's board of directors.

Results

The work of the project was valued by the interviewees, with child care subsidies the major focus of requests for additional assistance and training from the project. The evaluation also identified issues for the program to focus on in the future, including educating funding and oversight agencies on their role in providing child care. A need to better inform parents about their rights and responsibilities regarding child care subsidies was also identified, as were several specific areas of need such as non-English language assistance.

Advocates need current written information such as an in-depth manual and checklist of issues to look for in child care cases. Overburdened advocates also need more training in child care issues that they do not have time to learn about on their own. In the alternative, advocates are looking to the Child Care Law Center to directly take on more child care cases for their clients. While anecdotal evidence nationwide indicates the nature of welfare advocacy has changed with the advent of welfare reform, there is conflicting evidence as to whether this has resulted in an increase or decrease in clients with child care issues, since some programs report increases while others report decreases. Information from client community groups, however, indicates there is a need for more awareness of these issues on the part of direct service providers.

Conclusions

As a result of the interviews, it became apparent that the assistance provided by the project should focus on child care subsidies, rather than broadening into the area of increasing the supply of available child care. Direct service legal aid providers need more training in child care subsidy issues. This will increase the number of advocates who are able to spot child care issues and ask the project for technical assistance.

Inland Counties Legal Services, Client Services Center

Evaluation Overview: Legal assistance hotline for landlord/tenant, family, and consumer issues evaluated using review of case management data, project case files, and court docket data.

Project description

The Client Services Center is a telephone legal assistance hotline that provides immediate advice and counsel regarding housing, family, and consumer legal issues—with an emphasis on landlord/tenant issues. The hotline advises both tenants facing eviction and low-income landlords needing to evict. Assistance is also given regarding family law and consumer issues, consisting of intake screening, advice, and/or referral to branch offices, pro se clinic assistance, or other appropriate assistance. The project budget is about \$348,000 (including about \$286,000 EAF) for the 2003–2004 fiscal year, and the project operates using a managing attorney, 4 paralegals, and 2 other staff. Clients call a toll-free number, are screened for eligibility, and most (some need call-backs) receive immediate assistance. The results sought were 2,800 to 3,000 customers served per year. During the six-month study period, the project assisted 1,375 customers, 1,221 of whom received counsel and advice, 94 received brief service, 50 needed more extensive assistance or representation, and the rest were closed for other reasons, including referrals to other organizations.

Evaluation methodology

Case management data on all 1,375 clients was examined for this evaluation. A sample of 5 percent (66 cases) of the total population was also selected for client case review. In addition, 2002 census data was analyzed to uncover poverty rates and areas of housing shortage within the service area. For cases that resulted in litigation or for which assistance with court forms was provided, on-line court case dockets were printed.

To determine the effectiveness and quality of service, the evaluation examined how cases were handled by the center. More specifically, evaluators asked the following questions: (1) Is the center on track to meet its numerical goals, and are clients calling from throughout the service area; (2) Are cases handled within the priority areas; (3) Is timely service provided; (4) Are proper advice, follow-up contact, and timely attorney review being provided; (5) Is eviction assistance provided prior to, during, and postjudgment; (6) Are a range of housing cases with diverse legal issues handled; (7) Are referrals appropriate; (8) Has the hotline generated important issues for litigation; (9) Are various levels of assistance provided; (10) Are staff adequately trained and supervised. To assess these issues, the evaluation used reports from the center's case management system, review of client case files, review of on-line court case dockets for those cases resulting in litigation, and interviews with key staff.

The instruments used included a spreadsheet that recorded case statistics—case number, date of first contact, total case hours, problem type, and number of direct client contacts. A case review instrument was developed, evaluating the sufficiency of facts recorded, whether correct legal

advice was given, whether there was attorney review of the case, and how the case was closed. The court docket review instrument tracked whether the case was dismissed, an answer was filed, the client appeared in court, the case was settled, and there was a benefit to the client. A geographical distribution of cases was also generated, showing customers by legal problem, county, city, and urban, rural, or mountain area.

Results

The results of the analysis revealed the following:

- Eligible clients throughout the 27,000 square mile service area are being served.
- Hotline cases during the relevant time period were within the housing (89 percent), family (6 percent), and consumer (5 percent) law priorities.
- Proper advice is being given (95.5 percent of sample customers), with 41 percent having more than one phone contact. All cases in the sample had been reviewed by the managing attorney.
- Service is timely (77 percent of all callers received same day service) and proper advice is given.
- Legal assistance is being provided at all stages of unlawful detainer litigation (59 percent prelitigation, 7 percent after eviction pending but no judgment, 33 percent postjudgment).
- Legal assistance is being provided in a range of housing cases addressing diverse legal issues including private rentals, Section 8 subsidized units, residential motels, and homes in foreclosure.
- Appropriate referrals are made for legal assistance (Dissolution of Marriage Self-Help Clinic, branch legal aid offices, and out-of-state legal aid programs).
- Significant cases were generated by the hotline.
- Types of legal assistance provided included counsel and advice (88.8 percent), brief services (6.8 percent), and extended services including direct representation (3.7 percent).

Conclusions

The evaluation showed that the center is achieving its primary goal of increasing access to legal services. Without the center's telephone intake assistance, thousands of persons annually would not benefit from legal assistance due to lack of access to public transportation and technology. They further demonstrate that the center's hotline is helping low-income people to remain in their homes by providing preventive legal advice about their due process notice rights and right to habitable premises. The center plans to investigate the following questions for future improvements to the program:

1. Implementation of a formal substantive, procedural, and case management system training for staff.

2. The development of specialization among the hotline's paralegals.
3. Development of standardized FAQs and answers in form letters that could be mailed to clients.
4. Establishment of a formal written hotline handbook with policies, procedures, and other protocols.

Finally, the analysis revealed that additional efforts need to be made to reach underserved segments of the client population, including senior citizens and Spanish-speaking resident aliens.

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Removing Barriers to Employment

Evaluation overview: Driver's license clinic designed to help customers obtain a driver's license evaluated using a mailed client follow-up survey.

Project description

The project, operating with an annual budget of \$107,000 (\$53,000 EAF) is designed to help low-income persons whose denied, suspended, or revoked driver's license prevents them from entering or staying in the jobs or training for jobs with a career ladder and benefits that will lead to self-sufficiency. It uses one full-time attorney and a half-time support staff to operate driver's license clinics that give pro per legal advice to 30 persons per quarter at four community-based job placement or training centers. At the clinics, volunteer private attorneys that are trained by the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) annually give one-on-one specific advice and supplementary materials, including court forms, to each person who needs to proceed pro per to obtain a valid driver's license.

Evaluation methodology

The study population includes all participants in the driver's license clinics. The evaluation utilizes a one-page follow-up form asking participants if the clinic was helpful to them and to describe the outcome of their pursuit of both a driver's license and a job. Primary success measures are the percentage of positive to total responses and the percentage of persons making progress to getting a valid license. A secondary success measure is the percentage of persons entering or remaining in a job or training for a job with a career ladder and an average pay of \$12 per hour and benefits.

Three to three and a half months after each clinic, LAFLA mails a one-page, four-question survey to each participant along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Ten to 14 days later, LAFLA begins calling participants who haven't returned responses. Follow-up calls continue for two weeks with the goal of reaching each participant. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are prepared for each clinic, which are stored electronically and in hard copy.

Results

The findings for October through December 2003 reveal that 75 percent (41 of 54 participants) of clinic participants responded to the survey. Of those, 88 percent (35) responded positively to the clinic's services, and 58 percent (23) made progress toward or got a valid license. Because it takes participants at least three months to get a license, only 20 percent of participants had, as a result, obtained or kept a job or training for a job with a career ladder and an average pay of \$12 per hour and benefits. Those that obtained or kept a job or job training are in truck-driving or construction jobs with pay ranging from \$24 to \$40 per hour.

Conclusions

The pro per clinics operated by the project were effective in helping the majority of clients obtain, or make progress toward obtaining, a valid driver's license. Further follow-up surveys, conducted six to seven months following each clinic, would help determine whether, as a result of getting a driver's license, clients were able to get or maintain substantial employment.

Legal Aid Society of San Diego, Inc., Community Response Team

Evaluation overview: Telephone legal advice line regarding housing cases (for purposes of this evaluation) evaluated using client satisfaction surveys, in-court observations, and court case file reviews.

Project description

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego operates the Community Response Team (CRT) project that provides free, over-the-phone legal advice to more than 250³ low-income clients per month in areas of law such as housing, family, government benefits, and consumer law. The CRT has an annual budget of just under \$625,000 (about \$227,000 EAF) and is staffed by a supervising attorney, six paralegals, and 5.2 fte support staff. While most cases are handled in a single phone call, others are referred to specialty teams for more extended services.

Cases typically start with a customer calling for legal help. An intake worker screens the caller for eligibility (five to ten minutes), with eligible callers being transferred to paralegals, or in some cases directly to a specialty team. The paralegal then verifies eligibility and ascertains the facts and legal issues in the caller's case. The caller is then given advice regarding the relevant law and the client's legal options, and encouraged to call back with follow-up questions as their case progresses. If the paralegal is unsure about the proper advice, the supervising attorney is consulted. Once the case is completed, the paralegal completes the case notes and forwards the file to the supervising attorney for review.

³The project handles about 300 service calls per month, which includes about 50 clients calling a second time for follow-up or other additional assistance.

Evaluation methodology

Three outcome measures were used: (1) Participants were asked in client satisfaction surveys if they were satisfied with the legal advice provided by the hotline, whether the information is given in a manner that is understood and can be followed by the client, and whether the information provided by CRT staff helped the client to achieve a better outcome in court; (2) The second measure used court observations of clients who receive brief services and then represent themselves in court as compared with court observations of similarly situated litigants who did not receive CRT assistance; (3) The final measure used court case file review involving a review of court files for 26 clients who were assisted by CRT and thereafter represented themselves in court.

The study population of the client satisfaction survey measure includes, with some exceptions, persons who receive assistance through the hotline. The study population of the court observation measure consists of a random selection of clients who received advice or counseling from CRT and went on to represent themselves in court. The study population of the court case file review measure consists of a random sampling of 26 unlawful detainer cases for which CRT provided advice between October 1, 2003, and March 20, 2004, and thereafter represented themselves in court.

A two-page survey was sent to most clients upon completion of services (usually after a single call). The survey forms were available in English and Spanish. The survey was mailed to the client with a self-addressed stamped envelope to encourage its return. Each week a CRT senior attorney reviewed the surveys. Data from the surveys was then summarized and pie charts were created and analyzed by a CRT senior attorney.

For the in-court observations, observers sat in on the hearings or trials of seven CRT clients with unlawful detainer cases in the Superior Court of San Diego County and seven similarly situated and randomly selected litigants who did not receive CRT services. Observation of unlawful detainer cases was chosen because housing clients constitute the largest category of clients served by CRT and because of the relative frequency of hearings or trials in unlawful detainer cases. Observers completed a standard evaluation form noting whether or not the litigants were adequately prepared for court and the outcome of the hearing or trial.

On several occasions in May and June 2004, a law clerk went to the downtown branch of the superior court, reviewed the files of 26 cases, and recorded basic information about each case and judgment on a printed form. The data was then summarized, charted, and analyzed by a CRT senior attorney.

Results

In an average month, 12–16 percent of the surveys are completed and returned. For the reporting period, 157 clients (about 15 percent of those surveyed) returned their surveys. Across all questions, 80–85 percent of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied with the

assistance provided by CRT. This indicates that the quality of the paralegals' communication style and the helpfulness of the legal advice given are of good quality.

Results of the observations showed that litigants who received CRT counseling were more likely to appear at the hearing and were better able to communicate in court than litigants who received no assistance. It should be noted, however, that people advised by the CRT who later represent themselves in unlawful detainer hearings generally have few or no legal defenses. If the CRT had identified possible legal defenses, it would have transferred the case to the organization's housing team for further development. Therefore, these self-represented litigants were unlikely to prevail in court, and none of the observed customers did prevail.

Of the seven self-represented litigants who received advice, four appeared in court. Five of the seven cases involved opposing counsel. All of the four litigants who appeared, however, were able to reach a settlement with the landlord. Since the terms of the settlements were not disclosed, it was not possible to ascertain what benefit the client may have received from the process. Of the seven litigants not helped by CRT, only one appeared in court and was successful in getting the case dismissed without prejudice. In five of the other cases in which the defendant did not appear, no definitive outcome was obtained as the case was either set for trial or continued to a later date.

Review of court files showed that hotline customers understood and followed the advice given by CRT paralegals about how to file an answer to an unlawful detainer action since 22 of the 26 clients reviewed had filed an answer.

Conclusions

In developing this evaluation, it became apparent that no single evaluation tool would suffice to provide useful answers. Consequently, several evaluation tools were devised to provide a multifaceted look as how well the project was doing and what needed to be improved. The results showed that CRT is generally providing useful legal advice in a manner that customers can understand and use. Customers report several benefits of the service, and, if litigation is involved, they are better able to achieve good outcomes as opposed to those who have not used the service.

More specifically, the high degree of positive responses suggests a connection between the two primary factors used to determine success: the quality of the CRT worker's communication style and the helpfulness of the legal advice given. The information gleaned in the courtroom observations suggests that pro per litigants who received advice from CRT were more likely to appear in court and to interact constructively with opposing parties and their attorneys. While it is impossible to extrapolate the entire story from a courtroom observation, these measures provide valuable information. For instance, the information has provided a solid basis for increasing advice on the importance and basics of negotiating a settlement of a case, rather than just what to say at trial.

Another conclusion drawn from the study confirms that one-on-one attention is the best service model. Finally, it is evident that if more and better evaluation is to be conducted, additional funding will have to be received for those endeavors.

Areas for future evaluation include expanding the court observations and case file reviews to family law cases. Another important investigation would be to refine the court observations to gather evidence on differences between what plaintiff landlords ask for in a complaint and what they eventually receive (either through court decision or negotiated settlement). It will also be important to look more closely at the effect of opposing counsel on a pro per litigant's chances of success.

Mental Health Advocacy Services and Public Counsel, Juvenile Hall Advocacy Clinic

Evaluation overview: In-person, on-site advocacy assistance for juveniles detained in juvenile facilities evaluated using a form summarizing case outcomes at close of service.

Project description

The Juvenile Hall Advocacy Clinic addresses the needs of minors being detained in two of Los Angeles County's juvenile detention facilities and advocates for improved conditions at the facilities. It is operated as a joint project between Mental Health Advocacy Services (MHAS) and Public Counsel. The clinic has a budget of about \$38,000 per year, all of which comes from the Equal Access Fund. The staff consists of a half-time attorney along with a small amount of time from a support person. The clinic also makes use of volunteer attorneys and law students who visit juvenile facilities regularly to meet with minors and provide legal assistance in resolving grievances related to treatment, violation of rights, and/or the conditions of the facility. Assistance is delivered through both "brief service" advocacy (up to four contacts) and extended representation. The results sought include (1) favorable resolution of problems for at least 80 percent of the clients receiving extended representation, and (2) improvement in the living conditions and treatment of minors being detained in the facilities. During the study period, the clinic served 98 clients, almost all of whom achieved a negotiated settlement without litigation.

Evaluation methodology

Data is collected for every client served by the project. The information collected includes (1) total number of clients assisted by the clinic, (2) number of clients receiving extended representation, (3) demographic data such as ethnicity and gender of clients, (4) types of issues addressed, and (5) case outcomes.

During each client's intake interview, project staff and volunteers collect and record information on client demographics and issues to be addressed; outcome information is recorded in the case notes in each client's file when the case is closed. Mental Health Advocacy Services periodically

requests data from Public Counsel to add to its own reports. The project utilizes a standardized intake form to record information, which allowed staff and volunteers to uniformly ask all clients a thorough set of questions to determine each client's need and the issues to be addressed.

Results

A total of 98 clients were served by the project during the relevant time period. Fifty-five of the clients received extended representation from MHAS. The data shows that a wide range of issues are being addressed, including mental health (34 percent of clients), physical health (24 percent), education (20 percent), visitation (27 percent), advocacy with court personnel (34 percent), complaints against institution staff (16 percent), and living conditions (22 percent). Of those clients who received extended representation from MHAS, 38 percent had fully favorable outcomes and 44 percent had partially favorable outcomes.

Conclusions

The project's goal for individual advocacy is to achieve favorable outcomes in 80 percent of its cases. Since the data shows that fully or partially favorable outcomes have been achieved in 82 percent of cases, MHAS is reaching this goal.

San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, Domestic Violence Prevention Project

Evaluation overview: Domestic violence restraining order clinic evaluated using a client satisfaction exit survey and court case file review.

Project description

The Domestic Violence Prevention Project, operated by the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program (SDVLP) consists of domestic violence restraining order clinics that are located in three Superior Court of San Diego locations. Together they operate on an annual budget of almost \$258,000, about \$105,000 of which comes from the EAF. The clinics are staffed by attorneys and provide free legal advice and assistance to victims of domestic violence in obtaining domestic violence restraining orders. The results sought from this project are to have all eligible clients get protection for themselves and their children through obtaining a domestic violence restraining order. During the study period the three clinics helped 2,250 customers, mostly by way of brief service.

Evaluation methodology

All clients of the clinic were asked to complete the client satisfaction questionnaire at the completion of their services. A case file review was done on 13 random weeks (at least one week for each month) during the 26 week period. The clinics use two evaluation measures: 1) Client satisfaction questionnaires; and 2) case file review. The questionnaire asks clients to rate whether the clinic was helpful and prepared them to take the next steps needed on their case, and whether

the staff was respectful and courteous. The case file review analyzed demographic and outcome data for cases. The Client Satisfaction Surveys were given to each client by the person at the clinic who assisted that client – either staff or volunteer. The case file review was conducted by both staff and volunteers. Originally, the client Satisfaction Questionnaire that was used contained 3 questions and space for comments. After reviewing information provided by the Equal Access fund, the client satisfaction questionnaire was revised to ask questions specifically targeted by the fund.

Results

From mid-March 2004 through April 30, 2004, a total of 86 questionnaires were completed by clients (out of a total of 300 clients). The experience of clinic personnel with this questionnaire is that most clients are in too much of a hurry to complete even the initial simple questionnaire. All of the questionnaires expressed satisfaction with the services. The only negative comment concerned the time involved and that more helpers were needed.

The Case File Review was conducted on downtown cases only. The results of this analysis showed that of the 421 clients who were assisted by the clinic in preparing DVROs during that period, 88 percent (369) filed for a Domestic Violence Temporary Restraining Order (DVTRO), and out of those, 96 percent (354) were granted. After hearing, the number of orders granted fell to 43 percent (which included those not granted at the party's request or the case being removed from the calendar because of lack of service or the petitioner's failure to appear).

Conclusions

The good news is the high percentage of clients who obtained a DVTRO after visiting the clinic and filing. This indicates that, for those who do file, the paperwork is in order. The high degree of client satisfaction with the service is also encouraging.

On the other hand, however, the large numbers of clients (57%) who filed and obtained an ex parte restraining order but did not obtain an Order After Hearing is disturbing. More research is needed to determine the reasons for this.

E. Equal Access Fund Toolkit Description

The following introductory material was sent to all Equal Access Fund grantees in the fall of 2003, along with a "Toolkit" of instruments for use in evaluating their services. The Toolkit is available on the internet at <http://www.pic.org/toolkits.htm>.

Introduction

Welcome to the Legal Services Trust Fund Program Evaluation Toolkit, a collection of resource material to help legal services programs evaluate their work.

Background

More and more legal aid offices and support centers are learning new ways to look at what they do and how it works. They are taking a good, hard look at how they can improve their programs and services to get the best results for clients and client communities. They are finding new and better ways to ask “How well did we do?” and “Could we do better?” – and then to communicate the value of the work they do.

In California, there is an extra incentive to increase the evaluation of legal services programs. Along with a \$10 million annual line in the state budget for free legal assistance to low-income individuals and communities comes a requirement for a report to the State Legislature on the “efficiency and effectiveness” of funded projects.

Program-Owned Evaluation: An Invitation

To help with the report, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Legal Services Trust Fund Program, and the Legal Aid Association of California are inviting grant recipients to participate in an ambitious program-owned evaluation of the projects funded with Equal Access Fund grants. “Program-owned” means each organization will choose its own evaluation mechanism and do the evaluation itself, with help from this toolkit and other resources.

Strong legal services programs already do some program-owned evaluation. Everyone wants to do the best job possible for clients and other users of their services. Everyone has things they look for to figure out how they’re doing and to know when changes are needed. Everyone is accustomed to describing the effects of their work to communicate the importance of what they do. What legal services programs in California are being asked to do is to make that ongoing evaluation process more formal and structured.

The Evaluation Toolkit

The enclosed collection of “tools” for evaluation shows how others have already done this—examples of the forms they used, what they learned, the reports they wrote, and guidelines for following in their footsteps. Some of the examples are from highly evolved, structured evaluations that may look intimidating at first but are filled with good ideas. Others are first efforts from programs just starting out with evaluation that will encourage other beginners to see that this really is possible.

For programs willing to take on this challenge, the first step is to think about the planning that went into creating the project to be evaluated. What need was identified, what were the strategies for addressing it, and what results are being sought? The underpinning of a good evaluation is a clear sense of the goals and objectives of the project. The next question is, “How will we know whether we are achieving the desired results?” And then, “How do we gather the information that will help us answer that question?”

These are some ways legal services programs have collected evaluation information:

- User satisfaction surveys
- Follow-up interviews of clients and other customers
- Feedback from courts or other community partners
- Courtroom observation of self-help clients
- Review of court case files
- Systems for tracking client outcomes at case closing
- Focus groups

This toolkit contains examples and instructions for each of those ways of collecting information, for you to choose from or combine however they work best for your program (TABS 3 THROUGH 9). Each “tool” has three main elements:

1. A two-page “Summary” tells what the method measures and how, and lists some legal services programs that have already used it.
2. “Guidelines” suggests ways to use each method of collecting data, shares some cautions, and offers a variety of helpful tips.
3. Sample materials from other programs include the “instrument” used to gather evaluation data as well as examples from the evaluation reports.

Three sections that follow the seven tools address special evaluation challenges:

- Evaluating support and impact projects (TAB 10)
- Evaluating technology projects (TAB 11)
- Protocol for “partnership grant” evaluations (TAB 12)

These materials are supplemented by a few other resources. Some examples of comprehensive evaluation reports demonstrate the power of evaluation to improve and market legal services programs. Each is an evaluation of a California legal services project (TAB 13). Other useful material includes a set of guidelines for ethical research and discussions of a few other evaluation tools (TAB 14). The entire toolkit can also be found on the Web site of the Legal Aid Association of California at www.pic.org, where updates and links to other useful information about evaluation can also be found. To the extent possible, the survey instruments are available in editable formats on the Web site and by e-mail.

More Help Available

Behind TAB 2 is a list of people who can provide further help and information about how to contact them. The “champions” whose examples are in the toolkit have agreed to provide advice and technical assistance to others. Research staff from the Center for Families, Children & the Courts of the Administrative Office of the Courts can help in many ways, including advice about research techniques and practical help getting started. The staff of the Legal Aid Association of California will connect programs with others who can help them and will coordinate a schedule of working groups to talk about successes and share challenges.

The list also includes Web-based resources, giving general advice, directions for conducting effective research, and specific suggestions about evaluating legal services.

Authors

The Administrative Office of the Courts, the Legal Services Trust Fund Program, and the Legal Aid Association of California all greatly appreciate the expertise and dedication of The Resource for Great Programs that has made this evaluation toolkit possible. Ken Smith, President of The Resource, has led and coordinated the effort, with the excellent assistance of John Tull of John A. Tull Associates and John Scanlon of JSEA Management Systems. Ken, John, and John have brought to the project a wealth of knowledge about legal services programs, extensive experience with evaluation, and a talent for bringing people together to do creative things. Without them, this resource would not exist.

In Conclusion . . .

Good luck with your evaluations. We hope this toolkit will help strengthen your program and help you continually improve your critically important services to clients. Comments and other feedback about the tools, and suggestions for their improvement, will be much appreciated.